F129
.K4V27

F 129
.K4 V27
Copy 1

AN OLD KINDERHOOK MANSION

BY

HENRY C. VAN SCHAACK

Reprinted from the Magazine of American History, Sept. 1878

100 Copies printed

THE VAN SCHAACK HOUSE—KINDERHOOK.

AN OLD KINDERHOOK MANSION

KINDERHOOK is one of the oldest and most charming villages in the State of New York; being noted for its rural beauty, its fine residences, and its pleasant drives. There are beautiful prospects also from different points, among which are those of the valley of the Kinderhook Creek and of the distant Blue Mountains, as the Catskills are there called, from the circumstance that in certain states of the intervening atmosphere that pleasing hue is imparted to that range of mountains.

The village was settled by emigrants from Holland more than two hundred years ago; and among the oldest of those first settlers, who are still represented there by their descendants, are the Van Schaacks. Many interesting memories of past days cling around some of the old houses still standing in the village and its immediate vicinity. They bear witness in their high pointed gable ends and steep roofs, as well as in other respects, to their remote erection, and to the character of their early occupants, having been most substantially built in the ancient Dutch style, and in some instances with well-burnt brick brought from Holland. Chronological evidence of their erection has been perpetuated in some cases by large iron figures placed in their gables. The timbers put into these old buildings are simply marvelous for their great number and immense size. Strange as it may appear, it is not incredible that some of these timbers were transported from the old country, as it is a well-authenticated fact, that at an early period of the Dutch occupancy, heavy timber was brought over from Holland for the erection of church edifices on the well-wooded banks of the Hudson. There were no shams or death-traps in the erections of our Holland ancestors. The builders were not "a race eight stories high in their pride, but only twelve inches thick in their principles." They did not erect in their days, as is

now done in some of our cities, such flimsy edifices as give way to slight pressure, or such as are liable to tumble down of themselves or to be blown down by the wind to the destruction of human life.

Kinderhook village is situated on table land, originally pine clad, which abruptly terminates on a portion of its southern border. At this abrupt terminus of the plateau, there stood up to a few years ago, one of the very oldest Dutch houses in the village; a portion of which was at an early day a fort. It was the old Van Schaack mansion, being the residence of Colonel Cornelius Van Schaack, senior, the father of the four brothers, Henry, David, Cornelius, Jr., and Peter; and the father-in-law of Judge Peter Silvester; all of whom were men of mark in their day. The daughters of Colonel Van Schaack are ancestors, on the female side, of the Silvesters, the Wynkoops and the Van Alens of Kinderhook, and the Wynkoops of Hudson and Syracuse, as well as of many other families existant under various names.

The venerable mansion, referred to by John Jay in a letter written by him to his friend, Peter Van Schaack, in 1778, as "the hospitable house on the hill," had a commanding prospect of the rolling country and distant hills beyond, with a near and extensive view of the beautiful valley of the Kinderhook Creek, and affording glimpses of the stream itself quietly and gracefully meandering through the meadows and the shrubbery on its banks. Sir William Johnson was oft-times a guest in that old mansion; and a chest of drawers, once belonging to Sir William, was, until a few years ago, among its relics. Colonial affairs were here often discussed; and portions of the correspondence of Sir William with Colonel Van Schaack, and with Henry Van Schaack, who served under him in the "seven years' war," are still preserved.

Kinderhook having been in the direct line of land travel from New York city to Albany and the north and west for two centuries, many other celebrities, not only of the English colonial period, but of the revolutionary era, and of the new republic as well, have been entertained in this, the oldest of the Van Schaack mansions. Among its early visitors were members of the old families of Holland—Colden, Robinson, Cruger, Delancy, Watts, Laight, Walton, Jay, Benson, Bard, Murray, Van Rensselaer, Yates, Livingston, Gansevoort and Schuyler.

During its occupancy by Judge Silvester, in the latter part of the last and fore part of the present century, Aaron Burr, then in the height of his fame, was also one of its visitors; but after he had slain Hamilton, he ceased to enter its doors, well knowing that his presence would be unwelcome to those who had ever been ardent friends and admirers of

General Hamilton. In passing through Kinderhook after that famous duel, Colonel Burr uniformly stopped at the village hotel; and he used to send for Judge Silvester's son Francis, who had studied law with him, to meet him at the public house.

The most remarkable members of Colonel Van Schaack's family were Henry, the oldest, and Peter, the youngest son. Henry, who died in Kinderhook in 1823, in the ninety-first year of his age, was notable for native talent, sagacity, bravery and enterprise. He was for many years previous to the revolution engaged in the fur and peltry trade, and extended his operations in that line to Detroit and Mackinaw, previous to the Pontiac war. He was in official station under the Crown and Province of New York for twenty-five years before the revolution, and for fourteen years after the war he was a magistrate in Massachusetts. In Shay's rebellion he was an active and influential Government man, and upon that agitation he was elected a member of the General Court. He was a member of the Albany Committee of Safety in 1774, and he, together with Robert Yates and Peter Silvester, was by that body appointed a delegate to the first Continental Congress. He ceased to act with the revolutionary committees in 1775, under the conviction that there was a settled determination to secure independence and a permanent separation from the mother country at all events; or, as he quaintly expressed it in a letter to one of his brothers—"people have got to that pass that they do not consider the qualifications of a king, for that they will have no king."

A few years ago this old Van Schaack architectural landmark was necessarily torn down, it being then in too dangerous a position for habitation, in consequence of landslides, ocasioned by the subterraneous collection of water operating upon quicksand, and which in the process of time left the old house standing upon the brink of a precipice.

But it is the design of this paper more especially to notice a stately centennial mansion, situated on another part of the old Van Schaack estate, whose history is not without revolutionary, as well as other especial interest in itself, and in its historic and biographic associations. This edifice was erected in 1774 by David Van Schaack, one of the four brothers before named, for his own use, and designed by himself. It fronts on the pleasantest street in the village, and its imposing exterior, beautiful shade trees, and extensive lawn render it one of the finest situations in the town. It is a substantially built brick structure, with a strong stone foundation, two stories high, and with broad halls running through the center, above and below, having spacious rooms with high

ceilings on each side in both stories. The timbers used in its construction are rendered a great curiosity by their immense size. In accordance with the old Dutch style of building, there are broad seats in each window, the depth of which sufficiently indicates the strength of the outer walls. The doors are massive, with an immense silver knocker on the front one, large enough to arouse a neighborhood. The roof is ornamented by ballustrades. An outside view of the mansion at this day presents an air of stately grandeur and freshness, without any indication of its being an old edifice, and it surprises persons to be told that it was built previous to the revolution. The walls of the lower hall were originally covered with landscape papering brought from England, representing a hunting scene. The ballustrade of the staircase leading from the lower to the upper hall is large, and consists of solid mahogany, rendered by age as black as the darkest ebony.

In one of the upper rooms is still preserved an old fashioned fireplace, the jambs of which are ornamented with quaint Dutch tiles, which are a great curiosity. Each tile is about five inches square, and the number of them is fifty-four. On each tile is a pictorial illustration, in blue and white, of some scriptural scene, among which are the following subjects: Elijah going up in the chariot of fire, David killing the lion, Peter, and the cock crowing, Christ healing the blind, the cripple carrying his bed, Cain and Abel, Elijah fed by ravens, Mary washing the Saviour's feet, Christ washing Peter's feet, the good Samaritan, Tobias led by an angel, temptation of Adam and Eve, Sampson pulling down the pillars of the temple, Moses with the two tables of stone, the prodigal son feeding with swine, Christ and the barren fig tree, John baptizing Jesus, Dives and Lazarus at table, Christ rising from the tomb, Christ raising Lazarus, Joseph taking Jesus from the cross, death of the false prophet, Jonah cast up by the whale, the flight into Egypt, the prodigal's return. The other fireplaces in this house were originally ornamented with similar tiles, and Longfellow could not only poetically, but truthfully say of them—

> "Each hospitable chimney smiles
> A welcome from its painted tiles."

Among those other tiles there no doubt was that one in the series which represents a wise man pulling a beam, in the shape of a large stick of timber, from his own eye before proceeding to remove the mote from the eye of his brother. The back of the fireplace in the dining room consisted of an iron slab, orna-

mented by a circle of stars, and with the time of its casting in Holland (1789) in figures in the center. Ornamented iron chimney backs were not uncommon in this country at that period. In my father's house, erected in 1789, and standing next to this mansion, the back of the parlor fireplace was ornamented by the figures of two plump cherub boys stretched out in opposite directions, and reclining in graceful posture with their heads toward each other, the right arm of the one and the left arm of the other encircling each other's necks, and their bright laughing faces turned to the front. It was really a pretty sight, and a relief to the eyes when looking into the fire, to see those round-favored cherubs with the smile on their countenaces, while they were left entirely unharmed by the flames rising from the wood fire briskly burning before them.

This mansion, when first built, was elegantly set out with furniture imported from England, including the finest Wilton carpets ready fitted for the rooms by the manufacturer. Some of its large, old-fashioned mahogany chairs, and beautiful specimens of old China-ware, including two large syllabub bowls, with other rare articles of this description, are still preserved by the Sylvester family, who are connections of the original proprietor, and inheritors of many of his choice possessions.

Mr. David Van Schaack, the owner of this establishment, was an active, intelligent and courteous gentleman, uniformly well dressed in the costume of his day, and wearing ruffles at the breast and wrists finely plaited by female hands. His liberality and goodness of heart were illustrated by the voluntary liberation of all his slaves, some of whom afterwards returned to their old home to die, and were kindly cared for. Mrs. Van Schaack, whose name before her marriage was Catharine Van Valkenburgh, was an amiable, highly intelligent, and well-educated lady, and a model housekeeper. She always attracted great attention on account of her marked beauty, which is reliably represented to have been so exquisite that, on her visits to the city of New York, where great attention was always paid to her, persons meeting her in the streets would be so touched with admiration as to stop and look at her. For admiration and homage thus rendered, perhaps somewhat rudely, to a great beauty, pardon may be generously granted; for we have authentic evidence that even the uniformly polite and good General Washington could not resist the temptation of stopping in the streets of Kingston, during the Revolutionary war, to admire the beautiful wife of Tommy Van Gaasbeck. "Washington, struck by her beauty, paused to contemplate her, and spoke of her afterwards with admiration."

The married life of Mr. and Mrs. David Van Schaack was peculiarly happy: so much so indeed, that the husband is known to have said, "if every brick in that house could speak, it would fail to express the happiness I experienced in her society." Her portrait is still preserved in Kinderhook among other ancestral relics, and is now suspended in the mansion of Miss Margaret Silvester, whose mother was that adopted daughter, of Mr. and Mrs. David Van Schaack, alluded to in an interesting letter of Mrs. Quincy hereinafter referred to. In the mansion last mentioned are also still preserved portraits, probably more than one hundred and fifty years old, of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Cruger. They were the parents of Henry Cruger, member of Parliament, and of his sister Elizabeth, who was the first wife of Peter Van Schaack and the grandparents of that Henry C. Van Schaack who became Mrs. Silvester's first husband; her second husband was Francis Silvester, she having been married to two of her cousins.

On the private marriage of Peter Van Schaack to Miss Cruger while they were both quite young, he being only twenty and then in college, the lady's father, in his rage, threw his wig into the fire. The substantial worth of the son-in-law however, was such, that a lasting reconciliation shortly afterwards took place, and the evidences are abundant that no one of the good father-in-law's numerous descendants or friends enjoyed a larger share of his regard and confidence throughout his subsequent life than did Peter Van Schaack.

On his return from his exile in England in 1785, Peter Van Schaack, who was then a widower, made his home for a time in his brother David's family in this then new mansion; and he at once became "the observed of all observers." His safe return to his native country and home after an absence of nearly seven years, and under circumstances of peculiar interest, was the occasion for great rejoicing, not only among his connections, but to a host of other friends. It is thus referred to in a letter written at the time to Henry Van Schaack by Mr. John C. Wynkoop, a young lawyer who had married a niece of Mr. Van Schaack during the latter's absence from the country: "The happiness we all experienced on the arrival of Uncle Peter is much easier imagined than described. There is a certain something in his deportment, looks and conversation which, in my humble opinion, speaks an uncommon man."

Peter Van Schaack's society was now eagerly sought, and for abundant reasons besides those of his high character for intelligence and personal worth, and those other fine qualities which rendered him "an uncommon man." He had spent nearly seven years in England during

a momentous crisis in her history, and one replete with a peculiar interest to every American. He had there enjoyed rare opportunities for becoming acquainted with the public men of England, with her public institutions, and with her public measures. His brother-in-law, Henry Cruger, Jr., was for several years a member of Parliament, and, as co-representative for Bristol, the colleague of Edmund Burke in the House of Commons. His father-in-law, then residing in England, was a friend of Sir William Meredith, who was in intimate intercourse with Lord North.

With these and many other significant opportunities for acquiring information afforded to an intelligent and inquisitive American, whom Chancellor Kent describes as "the model of a lawyer, of a scholar, and of a gentleman," it is not strange that Peter Van Schaack, on his return from what was still regarded as the "mother country," or as it had before been called "home," became the center of a marked interest. The mere circumstance that he had seen so many different characters distinguished in literature, in the arts and sciences, in politics, in statesmanship, in the church and in the law, with some of whom he had a personal acquaintance, and respecting many of whom he could relate interesting anecdotes, was sufficient to attract attention. He had often witnessed the performances of the charming Mrs. Siddons upon the stage, and he had enjoyed the society of Hannah More. He had been professionally associated with Mr. Scott, afterwards the great Lord Eldon; and to his ears the "honied accents" of the eloquent Murray, then Lord Mansfield, were familiar. He had attended the Rotation office in Bow street when the venerable Sir John Fielding presided there, notable as the most famous judge in all history for his acuteness in the detection of villainy, although stone blind from his birth. Mr. Van Schaack had heard all the distinguished speakers in Parliament, and in the courts of Westminster Hall. He witnessed the early efforts of Erskine in the forum, and of Sheridan and Pitt in the senate. He enjoyed the rare privilege of hearing speeches by Fox and Pitt on the same day, and he had arraigned Fox, when ex-minister, in the newspapers for his political inconsistencies. He had dined at the same table with Burke at the Assizes, and had often heard that great statesman speak in Parliament. The pure-minded Lindley Murray, the grammarian, then in England, was from early life his bosom friend; Mr. Van Schaack had often visited the studios of Benjamin West and Sir Joshua Reynolds; and he had been in the company of the "literary colossus," Samuel Johnson. He was in London during Lord George Gordon's riots, and through those

numerous and rapid changes of the Ministry which marked an era. He witnessed the downfall of one set of Cabinet Ministers for their hostility to America; the abrupt secession of another; the dissolution of a third; the grand coalition which formed the fourth, itself soon after dismissed by royal interposition, making shipwreck of the political reputations of some of the greatest statesmen in the empire; and he had participated, by his pen, in the interesting discussions to which these extraordinary political revolutions gave rise.

Such was an animating and abounding chapter in the history of one who was content to pass the last forty-seven years of his life, the greater part of it in retired usefulness, in the little village of Kinderhook, which was the place of his death as well as of his birth. Mr. Van Schaack died in September, 1832, in the eighty-sixth year of his age. The late Benjamin F. Butler was at Kinderhook at the time, and there wrote an appreciative obituary notice which contains this passage: "Nature had conferred upon Peter Van Schaack a form and countenance corresponding in strength and dignity with the measure of his intellect. Even after death his features retained the noble impress of his superior endowments and might almost have been taken for some marble monument of ancient genius, to which they bore a peculiar and interesting resemblance."

In March, 1786, the proprietor of our centennial mansion, in writing to his brother Henry, then a resident of Pittsfield, gave this favorable account of country life in Kinderhook and its vicinity at that period, which is peculiarly interesting from the circumstance that it was so soon after the civil war. "Our country gentlemen," wrote Mr. Van Schaack, "live now in a true country style. Our houses and stables are all open to each other, and a most friendly disposition prevails all over the country."

In the summer of 1786, Madam Dwight, of Stockbridge, widow of Brigadier-General Dwight, and a lady of mark in her day, was the guest of Mr. David Van Schaack's family. She had been spending some time in the city of New York, and was then returning to her home by the route, usual at that time during the season of navigation, of Hudson River to Kinderhook landing, and thence overland through Kinderhook village to Stockbridge. On this visit to Kinderhook, Madam Dwight was accompanied by Miss Morton, a daughter of Mr. John Morton, of New York city, "a lady very young but full of spirit," and even then showing the acute observation and fine memory for which she was noted in after life. This young lady afterwards became the wife of President Quincy, of Harvard University. During a call made upon

Mrs. Quincy many years previous to her death, she informed me of her visit to Kinderhook, and of the deep impression it had made upon her mind. She afterwards very complaisantly acceded to my request for a copy of an account of that visit, of which she had made a note in a paper perpared by her in regard to her "early days." A few extracts from her interesting response to my request are here given:

"It may give you some gratification to read a passage from the manuscript relative to my voyage up the Hudson in 1786. We embarked in a sloop in which Madam Dwight and myself were the only passengers. The vessel itself, the noble river, and above all the 'highlands,' filled me with wonder and delight. The captain had a legend for every scene; and not a mountain reared its head unconnected with some marvellous story. One of the men played on the flute and woke the gentle echos, while the captain fired off guns to make the mountains reverberate a more tremendous sound. All this was enchanting to me. In the course of a *week* we arrived at Kinderhook. There we staid at the house of Mr. David Van Schaack, in the town of Kinderhook, several miles from the landing. This was a house of good old-fashioned hospitality. The mansion was large, and the furniture and domestic establishment marked the wealth of the proprietor, and was superior to those usually met with at that period. There were three brothers, David, Henry and Peter Van Schaack.* The two first had no children, and had adopted those of their sisters. In this respect, and in their general style of living, the family resembled the description since given of the 'Schuyler family' by Mrs. Grant. I can also witness to the truth of her account of the treatment of the domestic slaves in their families. The older men and women among them were on the most familiar terms with their masters and mistresses, and exercised considerable influence over the young people of the family, especially the old women. Still they were very respectful to their superiors, and much attached to their master and his family. We were received by this eminent and excellent family with the greatest kindness; and I think we staid with them several days, until a wagon came down from Stockbridge for us. I have always retained a lively remembrance of the hospitality we received. I also perfectly recollect a young lady, a niece, one of the adopted. Her name was, I believe, Lydia Van Vleck. I visited Stockbridge again in 1792, but did not pass through Kinderhook. During this visit I became acquainted Mr. Henry Van Schaack, of Pittsfield, at Mr. Sedgwick's, and visited his family at his residence. I still cherish the remembrance of Mr. and Mrs. Van Schaack's hospita-

ble reception of me. A striking feature of their mansion was the exquisite neatness of the house and everything about it. I had never seen the floors of entries, stairs, kitchen, etc., *painted;* and although brought up among the natives of Holland, who are proverbial for their neatness, this seemed to me 'a stroke beyond the reach of (their) art.' Mrs. Van Schaack appeared to me to be a very kind, matronly and dignified lady. Miss Van Vleck I soon found to be the sister of my first friend in Kinderhook; and these instances suggested the comparison I afterwards made to the same mode of adoption in the Schuyler family, as described by Mrs. Grant. You mention the review of Mrs. Grant's letters in the North American with interest and approbation. It is a singular circumstance that the review was written at my instance. I am glad that you are pleased with it. I presume that you have read 'The American Lady,' by Mrs. Grant; in which she gives, as far as my observation and experience have gone, in New York, Albany and Kinderhook, very correct accounts of the state of manners, etc., at that period. It brought to my recollection, as I have already said, similar scenes in your uncle's family."

Many great men and interesting characters have, at various times during the last century, been entertained in this old Kinderhook mansion; and these facts now impart to it great historic interest. Their presence within these old walls recalls to mind many incidents connected with their respective histories, and in some instances challenges the most sacred memories.

General Richard Montgomery, on his way to take command of the army against Canada, called on his friends, the Van Schaacks, at Kinderhook, and stopped in this house, which is thus most interestingly associated with one of the early martyrs of the Revolutionary war, whose name may fitly be placed side by side with that of General Warren, of Bunker Hill. On this occasion, as if anticipating the sad fate which awaited him, Montgomery gave to his early personal and military friend, Henry Van Schaack, several tokens of remembrance, one of which was his shaving-box, now in possession of Peter H. Silvester, of Coxsackie, a grand nephew of Mr. Peter Van Schaack; another token is a highly ornamented morocco pouch or case for the preservation of manuscript papers, now owned by Henry C. Van Schaack, of Manlius, a full nephew of Henry Van Schaack. The intimacy between Montgomery and Henry Van Schaack was great. They had both been officers in the war of 1755, Montgomery as captain in the Seventeenth Regiment, and Mr. Van Schaack, at different times, lieutenant, pay-

master and commissary. Among other autographs of Montgomery still preserved, is a business letter written by him to his friend Peter Van Schaack, in which, near its close, he thus playfully refers to his recent marriage to Miss Livingston: "Have you not some curiosity to know how the character of a Benedict sits upon me?" The letter closes with the "love of Mrs. Montgomery to Mrs. Van Schaack," and with an assurance of the writer's "esteem" for his correspondent. But, alas! how brief was the period of matrimonial felicity here referred to, and how suddenly disastrous and overwhelming are often the fortunes and reverses of war! Peter Van Schaack thus wrote from Kinderhook, to his father-in-law in England, in regard to the series of well-directed military movements in 1775, whereby the Americans became masters of the greater part of Canada. "The achievment of these laurels," wrote Mr. Van Schaack, "must principally be imputed to General Montgomery, who may now sit down in peace for the winter, and sheath his sword for lack of argument." Too soon, however, was the same writer obliged to present this sadly changed picture before his kinsman. "A wonderful reverse of fortune," wrote Mr. Van Schaack to Mr. Cruger, "has taken place in Canada in consequence of an ill-fated attack upon Quebec, in which General Montgomery fell, and most of his principal officers were killed, wounded and taken prisoners." Among the cherished relics which once graced this historic mansion and which are still preserved, is an old-fashioned sofa on which Captain Montgomery had often reclined. Could that interesting relic now speak, how fully it would bear witness to the intelligent conversations of its pure-minded and patriotic occupant.

In October, 1777, the doors of this mansion were darkened by a revolutionary character of a very different stamp from the one last referred to. This was General Burgoyne, then on his march through the State, not as a conquering hero, but as a prisoner of war. It was provided by the Saratoga articles of capitulation, that "the army of Lieutenant-General Burgoyne should march to the Massachusetts Bay by the easiest, most expeditious and most direct route." This route from Albany, at that day, was through Kinderhook. A letter was preserved for many years in our centennial mansion, written by Jacob Cuyler, deputy Quarter master-General, dated at Albany, 18th October, 1777, and directed to Major Hoes, at Kinderhook, in which the writer says: "This moment I have received directions from General Gates to supply the prisoners and those who will guard them, to the amount of six thousand. They will be at Kinderhook by Monday night. You will immediately order

a man to remain on the road and order fifty head of cattle to come to you out of the first drove he meets to supply them. Captain Spencer will bring fifty more by Monday night. They will want about four hundred barrels of flour to be issued to support them on the road." The captured army remained on the plains at Kinderhook for several days. The soldiers paid the farmers high prices for the poultry and other things they bought of them, but after they were gone, the poor farmers found that the coin they paid was false, being copper coated with silver. General Burgoyne and his principal officers, who had been so liberally entertained by General Schuyler in Albany, on their arrival at Kinderhook, dined in this mansion; but they probably did not have before them the numerous "covers" mentioned by General Burgoyne, in his speech in Parliament, as having graced General Schuyler's table. An amusing incident, however, occurred at the Kinderhook dinner. After the removal of the cloth wine was introduced. In the course of entertainment, a glass of wine was put into the hands of a little girl present (an adopted daughter of the gentleman of the house), and she was asked to give a toast. She archly said: "God save the King and all the royal family." Tradition has it that the family of the host were much annoyed by this little incident, fearing that their loyalty would be suspected by the American escort; and yet it is not conceived why good Christians may not ask God to save a king and his family as well as their other enemies for whom they are taught to pray. And so this matter seems to have been understood by some, at least, of our military commanders, as is illustrated by this other well-authenticated Burgoyne-Gates anecdote On the surrender, "the English and German generals dined with the American commander in his tent, on boards laid across barrels. On this occasion, General Burgoyne proposed a toast to General Washington; an attention that Gates returned by drinking the health of the King of England.

The news of Burgoyne's surrender was brought to Kinderhook by Colonel Henry Van Rensselaer, on his way from Saratoga to his residence in Claverack, and its truth confirmed by the particulars given—that he had dined with the captive general in General Gates' marquee. When the rumor of this great event was mentioned to Peter Van Schaack, he remarked with emphasis: "If this be true, I pronounce you an independent nation."

As Generals Burgoyne and Phillips, after leaving Kinderhook, were riding on horseback through Klinekill, a sturdy woman called out and

enquired: "Which of the gentlemen is Mr. General Burgoyne?" The General, raising his *chapeau-bras*, and gracefully bowing, proceeded on his way; while the (perhaps) Tory lady by the road side made a polite curtesy and retired to her dwelling.

Not long after the passage of Burgoyne, Benedict Arnold was conveyed through Kinderhook on his way from Saratoga to Connecticut. One of the side posts of the door-way, in the house at which he stopped, was cut out to make room for the litter on which the wounded officer, then in the zenith of his reputation, was borne.

The distinguished characters whose presence graced our centennial mansion at an early day are too numerous to be named. Among them were John Jay, Alexander Hamilton, Egbert Benson, Philip Schuyler, Theodore Sedgwick and Chancellor Kent.

Henry Cruger Van Schaack, before referred to, died in this house in 1797, leaving it to his wife and child. It was afterwards leased to the Honorable Cornelius P. Van Ness. This gentleman subsequently became Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Vermont, Governor of that State, Collector of the Port of New York, and Minister to Spain. He was the father of Mrs. Judge James I. Roosevelt. His brother, John P. Van Ness, was a member of Congress, Mayor of Washington, and by a fortunate marriage with the heiress of Washington, became the owner of more than half of the site of that city. Still another brother, William P. Van Ness, was for many years a Judge of the district for the Southern District of New York. He studied law with Aaron Burr, was his second in the famous duel with Hamilton, and the author of "Publico." All of these last named were sons of Peter Van Ness, a man of mark in his day, an officer in the old French war, a member of the State convention that ratified the Federal Constitution, a member of our State Senate, and first Judge of Columbia County. The "P" was introduced into the names of these three sons in pursuance of Dutch nomenclature, and to show they were sons of that Van Ness whose first name was Peter.

The surname of this family, as Washington Irving has gravely told us, had its origin from the fact that their ancestors were "valiant robbers of birds' nests." However true that may be, the numerous offices held by so many different members of this old Dutch family sufficiently show that they lost no opportunity of "feathering their own nests."

Our old mansion was next sold to a gentleman who, in one of his merry moods, threw a billet of wood at the devoted heads of

two persons, then living with him. Happily his aim was too elevated, and the stick struck the lintel of the dining-room door, where the tell-tale scar still lingers. This plethoric old gentleman died in 1813; and tradition informs us that his uneasy ghost now haunts the sideboard, making night hideous by the clattering of the glasses when they are not well filled. This same person bequeathed to his friends, the colored gentry, a lot for burial, on condition that they would never part with the sacred gift. As this lot lies in the heart of the estate, it was doubtless an act of disinterested generosity, which nevertheless sometimes tempts "the poor white folks" to execrate his memory, while the colored brethren continue to show their gratitude by interring three deep. Under the will of this owner the property was sold at auction, and Doctor John P. Beekman became the purchaser, and took up his abode in it in 1814. He married for his first wife Catharine Van Schaack, the only child of Mrs. Francis Silvester by her first husband. Doctor Beekman renovated the house in 1846, and greatly improved it by the addition of two wings, constructed in the same substantial and imposing style of architecture as the original building. After ex-President Van Buren had closed his public career, and removed from Washington to spend the rest of his life in his native town, his seat at Lindenwald became famous as a resort of the great men of the land, and of other characters more or less conspicuous. Mr. Van Buren was very often the guest of Doctor Beekman, and it was a common circumstance for him to introduce some of his own distinguished visitors into our centennial mansion, which is only three miles distant from Lindenwald. Among the visitors thus introduced were Henry Clay, Washington Irving, John L. Stephens, Thomas H. Benton, David Wilmot, Charles Sumner, Silas Wright, General Beltrand, Auguste Devezac, Commodore Nicholson, Frank Blair, William L. Marcy, John Forsyth, Azariah C. Flagg, and many others whose names are not recollected. The present Earl of Carlyle, who spent several days at Lindenwald, when travelling *incognito* in this country as Lord Morpeth, was at that time entertained in this mansion also.

On Henry Clay's visit to Kinderhook the year previous to his death, he dined in the same room in which the captive British General had been entertained three quarters of a century before, and he expressed great interest in that circumstance, and was not a little amused by the anecdote before related about the little girl toasting the King and all the royal family. That little girl, who was the life of our centennial mansion in her early days, was still living at Kinderhook at the time of

Mr. Clay's visit, but she had then become a highly intelligent and most interesting old-school lady, adding to great sweetness of disposition a refined taste, gentle and most pleasing manners, and a remarkable memory, to which I have been indebted for many of the incidents detailed in this paper. Mr. Clay paid his respects to this venerable lady by calling upon her at her residence, under the escort of ex-President Van Buren. It was an interesting interview. Mrs. Silvester survived Mr. Clay five years. She died in Kinderhook, in the full faith of a ripe Christian, in 1857, in the eighty-fourth year of her age. As was to be expected, a public reception was given to Mr. Clay at the village hotel, where a large number of citizens were introduced to him. A young lady made her appearance to be introduced to the great statesman; unfortunately, the gentleman to whom was assigned the duty of making the introductions on this occasion, and who was every way competent to the task, had forgotton the lady's name, and betrayed his embarrassment. Mr. Clay, with his usual tact, happily relieved the gentleman from his dilemma by saying to the introducer, "Mr. Beekman, never mind the lady's name now, she will soon change it."

Thomas H. Benton, on his visit to Kinderhook, delivered an address in the Dutch church, but in the English language; "Old Bullion," with all his skill as a linguist, and his capabilities as a great writer and public speaker, not being able to address the Kinderhookers in their Dutch vernacular, his "Thirty years in the Senate" did not avail him.

The honorable David Wilmot, of Pennsylvania, the great Congressman, was a large man, filling, comparatively speaking, as large a space in the visible as he did in the political world. Mr. Wilmot was escorted from Lindenwald to Dr. Beekman's residence by Mr. John Van Buren, who united to great ability and shrewdness as a lawyer the wit of a wag. Mr. Van Buren, with big Mr. Wilmot standing by his side, thus introduced that gentleman to the lady of the house: "Mrs. Beekman," said Mr. Van Buren, "you have heard of the Wilmot Proviso? Here he is in a body."

Doctor Abraham Clark, formerly of New Jersey, the father-in-law of Doctor Beekman, spent the last twenty-five years of his life in the latter's family, and died in our centennial mansion in 1854, in the eighty-eighth year of his age. Mrs. Clark died here two years afterwards, aged ninety-two. Dr. Clark's father was a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Doctor Beekman died in this house in 1862. Thomas Beekman, brother of the Doctor, whose wife was a daughter of Doctor

MAR 30 1935

Van Schaack, became its owner in 1864. He was at that time a widower, spending his winters in New York with his niece, Mrs. A. J. Vanderpoel, and only using it as a summer residence. Mr. Beekman served one term in Congress, 1829 and 1830. He was a gentleman of cultivated intellect, refined taste, and extensive reading. Many of the incidents recorded in this history were taken from his lips. He died in 1870, in the eightieth year of his age. Since that time the old house has been the summer residence of Aaron J. Vanderpoel, whose wife is a grand-niece of David Van Schaack, its original proprietor, and a grand-daughter of Peter Van Schaack, LL. D.

HENRY C. VAN SCHAACK

* A fourth brother was Cornelius, the father of the mother of James I. Roosevelt.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 014 109 301 0